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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERS DISCUSS LAND, AFRO-COLOMBIAN LEADERSHIP, AND GOC RELATIONS

REF: A. A) BOGOTA 3855
 1B. B) BOGOTA 3879
 1C. C) BOGOTA 3778

SUMMARY

11. Human rights groups, including representatives of indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups, addressed human rights, Afro-Colombian, and indigenous rights issues at a May 25 lunch hosted by Polcouns. Justicia y Paz urged higher-level GOC involvement in talks with human rights groups, and respect for "humanitarian zones" from all armed actors (including the Colombian Armed Forces). An Afro-Colombian participant detailed how leadership problems, corruption, racism, and lack of a clear social and political identity create challenges for the Afro-Colombian community. The human rights leaders, generally critical of the Uribe Administration, admitted Uribe's popularity and attributed it to his hard work and tough security policy. End summary.

12. At a May 25th lunch hosted by Polcouns, human rights groups representatives discussed their relations with the GOC, and raised specific human rights concerns. Participants included:

--Sister Celia Naranjo of Justicia y Paz
--Lizardo Donico of Organizacion Nacional Indigena de Colombia (ONIC)
--Gustavo Gallon of Comision Colombiana de Juristas (CCJ)
--Gustavo Lugo of the Movimiento Nacional por los Derechos Humanos de las Comunidades Afrocolombianas (CIMARRON)

LAND REMAINS A CONCERN

13. Donico and Lugo said indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have trouble working with the GOC's land titling agency, INCODER, due to corruption and pressure by armed groups. Naranjo cited the delays in returning land to the dispossessed Afro-Colombian communities of Curvarado and Jiguiamando as an example of the difficulties of working with INCODER (reftel A). She said the paramilitary demobilization has led to a drop in violence in Choco and other areas, but cautioned that Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities continue to be pressured by new criminal groups, narcotraffickers and the FARC. She claimed commercial interests, such as African Palm producers, frequently use violence to force indigenous or Afro-Colombians to allow them

to operate on communal lands. Naranjo is working to get all actors (including the Colombian Armed Forces) to respect "humanitarian zones" where community members seek to escape the violence. Donico said all armed groups should also agree not to enter indigenous resguardos without permission. All agreed illegal groups, as well as the Armed Forces, are unlikely to accept such limits.

¶4. Donico and Lugo agreed good communication between indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities is in place, especially on land issues. Donico said it is sometimes difficult to coordinate with Afro-Colombians, given the numerous and diverse organizations that represent its interests. While the umbrella group ONIC represents 80 percent of indigenous organizations, no such equivalent umbrella group exists in the Afro-Colombian community, he said.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN THE AFRO-COLOMBIAN COMMUNITY

¶5. Lugo said the largest challenge facing the Afro-Colombian community is building an Afro-Colombian identity in the face of racism and economic hardship. Widespread factionalism and weak ethnic identify makes it hard to develop a unified social-political agenda. The process to choose local community leaders -- and decision-making on resource allocation -- is weak, unorganized, and sometimes corrupt. Lugo said racism remains a serious problem in Colombian society, and that not enough is done by the GOC for a population that represents at least 10.5 percent of Colombia. The recent GOC appointment of Paula Moreno as Minister of Culture was political theater, he claimed.

RELATIONS WITH THE GOC

¶6. All the participants said they were in regular contact with the GOC on human rights issues, but complained their contacts lacks decision-making authority. Gallon said the Vice President's Human Rights Office needs to address four concerns: 1) the need for more resources from the international community; 2) more GOC action to fight impunity; 3) greater protection for at risk communities; and 4) completion of the National Plan for Human Rights. All complained GOC officials at meetings on human rights or land issues are too junior to make decisions, leaving the communities with vague promises and few answers. Gallon voiced concern over recent accusations by demobilized paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso that Vice President Santos had urged the paramilitaries to set up a presence in Bogota. He said the accusation needs swift investigation by the National Prosecutor's Office (Fiscalia), and suggested Santos should recuse himself from human rights issues during the investigation.

URIBE'S FARC PROPOSAL

¶7. Lugo said Afro-Colombian communities would accept less justice for illegal armed actors and their supporters if such benefits were accompanied by programs to address the underlying causes of the conflict such as poverty and lack of effective political representation. Still, he voiced skepticism that President Uribe's recent proposals to release FARC prisoners and provide reduced jail time for paramilitary collaborators (refs B-C) would contribute to lasting peace. He added that the M-19 demobilization process in 1991 and the early stages of the Justice and Peace process did little to address poverty and unemployment, which is why some ex-paras are returning to crime.

URIBE'S POPULARITY?

¶ 8. Gallon, when pressed, admitted President Uribe remains enormously popular with the Colombian public. He attributed Uribe's popularity to: a public opinion backlash against the FARC and desire for a hard-line security policy after President Pastrana's failed FARC peace process; more effective delivery of basic services to marginalized populations; Uribe's constant outreach efforts; and Uribe's public relations savvy. Gallon claimed Colombia's "paramilitarization" had also led to apathy and acceptance of Uribe's policies. Finally, he charged the GOC frequently manipulated statistics, which created false perceptions of progress.

Drucker